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Chadrad Communications, Inc.
226 Bordeaux St - Chadron, NE 69337
308-432-5545 fax 308-432-5601
E-mail: kcsr@chadrad.com

(Neb.)-Temporary Closures Planned at Nearly 30 State Parks And Recreation Areas



By: Roxie Graham-Marski Posted at: 08/30/2013 07:04 PM

Photo: Ash Hollow State Park

(LINCOLN)-Nebraska Game and Parks commissioners say a tight budget is forcing the temporary closure of all services and vehicle access to 24 state recreation areas (SRA) and five state historical parks (SHP).

The purpose of the closures is to redirect Game and Parks staff from the closed areas in an effort to reduce more than \$30 million of deferred maintenance needs of the aging Nebraska State Park System and meet compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and environmental requirements.

State recreation areas that will close Monday, Sept. 16, and not reopen until May 1, 2014, are:

Blue River
Cheyenne
Conestoga
Cottonwood
Dead Timber
DLD
Keller
Long Lake
Long Pine
North Loup
OliveCreek
Oliver Reservoir
Pelican Point
Riverview Marina
Rock Creek Lake
Sandy Channel
Schramm

Sutherland
Union Pacific
Verdon
Stagecoach
Walgren
War Axe

Vehicle access to boat ramps will remain open at Riverview, Pelican Point and Sutherland's Hershey Beach.

State historical parks that will close Monday, Sept. 16, and reopen May 1, 2014 are:

Ash Hollow
Buffalo Bill
FortHartsuff

The closure of Arbor Lodge in Nebraska City will be delayed until Monday, Sept. 23, following the Applejack Festival, and will reopen April 23, 2014 in time for the Arbor Day celebration. Fort Atkinson SHP and Alexandria SRA will close Oct. 7 and reopen May 1, 2014. This is to accommodate FortAtkinson's annual living history weekend that takes place Oct. 5-6. The delayed closure at Alexandria SRA accommodates services being provided by a concessionaire.

These closures are the continuation of a process over the past five years that has led to the transfer of eight park areas, privatization and consolidation of several park operations, and elimination of 43 permanent park positions (nearly 20 percent). These decisions have been driven by the lack of a sustainable funding source to operate and maintain a quality State Park System into the future.

"The temporary closure of parks and the redirection of staff to work priority projects is one more step in an effort to address the funding challenges of the Nebraska State Park System," said Game and Parks Director Jim Douglas. "Game and Parks recognizes and values the importance of our partnerships and the role our state park areas play. These measures are a necessary management decision that is difficult to make, but Game and Parks is running out of options. We hope the public and our park visitors will understand we are doing everything we can to shore up our infrastructure and meet our mandates for accessibility and requirements regarding environmental compliance in light of the limited funding available."

State Sen. Bill Avery introduced LB362 during the 2013 legislative session. The bill was designed to replace the Park Entry Permit by placing a \$7 charge on the motor vehicle registration fee. LB362's future is uncertain, but if passed as proposed, the bill's language would repeal the Park Entry Permit requirement for residents and generate enough annual revenue to provide a sustainable funding model that would allow Game and Parks to properly address deferred maintenance and ADA needs to ensure a quality State Park System.

--Nebraska Game and Parks Commission